



Michael Fougere, the new mayor of Regina, speaks to the media after his victory Wednesday, Oct. 24. Photo by Matt Dugid

Parallel campaigns affect democracy

by Aaron Stuckel
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With Michael Fougere’s win in the 2012 Regina civic election, it’s safe to say that the city’s business community is looking forward to the next four years. The man’s pro-Revitalization Initiative stance was a divining rod on the campaign trail, while the two other top runners split their votes by both suggesting changes to the plan. But, as most know, elections are not won on ideas alone.

Throughout election campaigns, business and labour groups take on campaigns of their own, advertising what their needs are and how they want their future to look. Though it is the role of these organizations to look after their members’ interests, their advertising is seen by more than just those who belong to business or labour groups. Non-partisan citizens are often swayed by these ad campaigns, and it follows that partisan groups who spend the most money often end up winning in the end. This is a consistent problem in elections at every level of government, and one that threatens the democratic process.

The Regina Chamber of Commerce came under fire late in the election race in a Regina *Leader-Post* column written by left-leaning political commentator Greg Fingas. Fingas claimed that a website sponsored by the Chamber looked too much like an official election website.

“It’s difficult to imagine a more brazen attempt to assume

a veneer of official sanction for plainly self-interested interference in a municipal election,” he opined.

Reginavotes.ca contained a package of information detailing what the Regina Revitalization Initiative would do for the city, and offered a list of pro-business questions for citizens to ask candidates if they happened to knock on their door.

It was clear that the Chamber was hoping for a Fougere win, though they never publicly supported him. When John Hopkins, CEO of the Chamber, walked out of a backroom at city hall after all the polls came in, he looked dog-tired but slightly elated.

“I think the message that I’ve heard is ‘let’s continue to move ahead in the direction that Regina’s been moving,’ which we believe has been very positive for this community,” he said. The Chamber’s ad campaign had paid off.

But they weren’t the only ones who ran parallel campaigns alongside the civic election. CUPE Local 21, which represents 1,250 outside city workers in Regina, also ran an election website that detailed the failings of the city plaza project. Labour groups also published some leaflets for citizens to read, but it was not to the same extent of the Chamber’s campaign, nor did any of the websites contain insignia similar to the City of Regina’s (as the Chamber’s site did). In the end, the money won.

This isn’t the first time that the Chamber or CUPE has run ad campaigns during elections.

In the 2011 provincial election, the Chamber ran ads with the slogan “On Track” and CUPE started a website called *imagine-what-we-could-do.ca* which supported raising royalty rates on the province’s resources. Both claimed to be non-partisan, but in the context of the election issues, it was clear who they were supporting.

It’s hard to say how much money these organizations spend on their advertising campaigns. Any non-voting group can donate as much money as they like to the party of their choice. All that’s required is disclosure on any amount over \$500 that goes to a mayoral candidate. But that disclosure comes from the political party, not the donors. Any money spent by an organization remains a private affair if it isn’t going directly to a candidate. This can tally up quickly, too, considering a digital billboard can cost anywhere from \$500 to \$2000 a month, and a 30-second radio spot averages about \$65 for a full seven-day schedule.

In 2009, Pat Fiacco’s successful campaign cost him over \$40,000 with about one-third of that money going toward advertising. In the same election race, Fougere spent a mere \$215.50 and didn’t even crack the top three in votes. We won’t know much about Fougere’s campaign spending in 2012 until the numbers are made public, but what this shows is that money in advertising goes a long way in winning elections. And, regardless what side of the political equation a non-voting organization lies

on, its advertising also holds a lot of sway.

But these ad campaigns can be damaging to the democratic process. Casual voters can misconstrue a website as official campaign material, and the interests of large organizations can sometimes sway votes. In order for democratic elections to live up to their mantra, the minds of the people must be allowed to think freely and without biased pressure from organizations with political motives.

But what to do? In the end, few voters are seriously educated in campaign issues and the candidates that they are electing. Ad campaigns by groups from the left and the right are not the appropriate form of education. If the two sides focused solely on getting people out to vote, the democratic process would be stronger for it. But even then, what good is a voter base that is uneducated on the issues at hand?

Maybe the answer lies in another website that ran through the 2012 civic election. David Loblaw, who put his name in early on in the mayoral election race, operated the site *reginaelection.com* after dropping out of the race in early May. Though clearly running on a much lower budget than either the Chamber site or the CUPE site, *reginaelection.com* offered free, unbiased information on all candidates with the “sole goal to increase voter turnout.”

In the end, if you take the politics out of election advertising campaigns, all that’s left is increased voter turn out — a win for everyone.

REGINA VOTES

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CIVIC
ELECTION EDITION

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Election wasn't decided online

by Austin Davis
@theausitnx

For the first time, social media played a role in Regina's mayoral election, but it didn't create a surprising victory or an impressive turnout.

When Pat Fiacco won his last of four elections in 2009, he didn't have Twitter. Not that he needed it.

Mayor-elect Michael Fougere had Twitter before the election on Oct. 24, but he didn't need it either. He won by more than 5,000 votes; a number that far exceeded his followers and likes on Twitter and Facebook.

Paris-based analyst group Semicast released numbers of Twitter users in July. Canada ranks eighth in the world for Twitter accounts with 10 million, only about two per cent of the total accounts in the world.

At City Hall after his victory, Fougere told INK that as a new user of social media, he found Twitter especially useful that night.

"I found the results of the election on Twitter before I saw it on television," Fougere said. "It's quite amazing what the impact is of social media."

Fougere's campaign was a remarkable example of name recognition – rewarded by 21,685 votes. He had served 15 years as a city councilor in Ward Four and an early endorsement from Fiacco essentially locked up Fougere's victory.

The mayoral race was Fougere's to lose from the start, a fact that put pressure on his two main competitors, Marian Donnelly and Meka Okochi.

Before the polls closed, Donnelly, who placed second with 16,240 votes, acknowledged that social media had its limitations.

"I think that it helps you reach a certain age group. The thing that I found on this campaign was Twitter was where the most negativity came up," Donnelly said.

Donnelly said it was much easier and more effective to deal with serious questions on Facebook and her website.

Meka Okochi called social media a "fundamental tool" during his campaign. He said that using traditional methods would have been nearly impossible, as he wanted a grassroots campaign.

"Twitter has been a very good tool for us because we understood a couple of things: that it can be a powerful tool, but it can also be a very damaging tool," Okochi said.

Okochi's approach resonated with a younger demographic. He captured 8,960 votes, 17 per cent.

Okochi and Donnelly combined for more votes than Fougere, a sign that dissenting voices in Regina were unable to unite under one candidate.

After the 2008 American election,

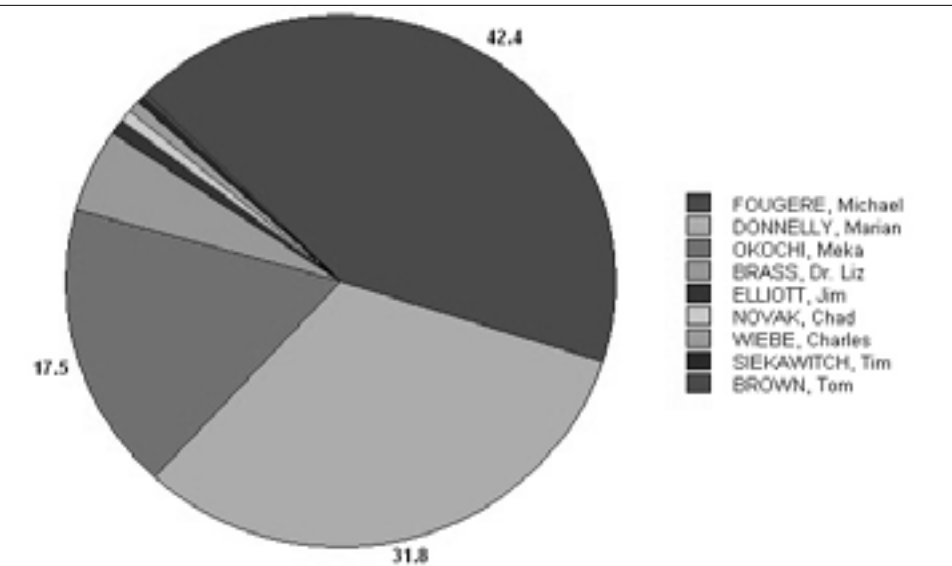


Chart shows City of Regina 2012 election results

Matthew Kushin and Masahiro Yamamoto studied college students' use of social media in Barack Obama's victory. Routledge published their findings in 2010.

They found that traditional Internet sources had much more impact on the election. In their conclusion they wrote that the open and collaborative nature of social media is a user-content generated platform. Without discourse that engages people, social media would cease to be relevant for any political purpose.

Brennan Neufeld, a student at the University of Regina, used social media to make his decision on election day.

"Twitter helped me figure out who I wanted to vote for based on their personality. I did not specifically follow any candidates but I looked at their feeds and I saw what they were saying and I tried to piece together who they were and not what their policies were," Neufeld said.

Neufeld, 22, was a Twitter user before the election and had an understanding of how it should and shouldn't be used. He said that how candidates conducted themselves online would reflect how they conduct themselves if elected into office.

During the months leading up to the campaign, there was a lot of focus on #yqrvotes. The Twitter hashtag became a place people could go to share opinions on the civic election.

Sitaram Asur and Bernardo A. Huberman created what they called a model to predict the future using social media and published it online at arXiv. They used movie box office earnings as their example and argued that the frequency, mass and tone of tweets could be used to predict the popularity of movies.

This model has been loosely adapted in the past to the American system during primaries. Its fatal flaw is that it does not include the large number of people who do not use Twitter.

Though candidates were using social media to communicate with potential voters, these were people who were already engaged users of these outlets. Only 32 per cent of eligible voters cast ballots, seven per cent higher than in 2009. The 51,440 votes were only about 16,000 more votes than the total in Fiacco's last election.

There was a much larger voter base in this election that were receiving campaign information in traditional means: billboards, flyers and the mainstream news.

In four years there will be more people using social media in Regina as an important way to share information, especially about politics, but it might be a while until that group becomes the voting majority.



Mayor-elect Michael Fougere. Photo by Austin Davis

When the minority rules

by Vanda Schmockel
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With Regina's municipal election behind us, the business of getting on with running Saskatchewan's capital city will soon be in Mayor-elect Michael Fougere's hands. But when Fougere is sworn in, he'll be taking the job without the support of the majority of Regina's voters.

Of the three leading candidates, Fougere won with 42.4 per cent of the vote. Marian Donnelly and Meka Okochi followed behind, making up 31.8 and 17.5 per cent of the vote respectively.

A tally of 42.5 per cent does not make a majority, and yet with that, Fougere has won the mayor's seat. That's how it works in the so-called first-past-the-post electoral system that most of Canada uses. But there are other voting systems to choose from and, many argue, fairer ways of making sure that all voters feels represented. In the existing system, it's common for a voter to cast a ballot and never see their choice make a difference.

"If you voted for the person (who won), you're represented by someone you voted for. But if you voted for somebody else, well too bad for you. You take what you get," said Wayne Smith, executive director of Fair Vote Canada. "Proportional systems are designed so that everybody can be represented by somebody they voted for. It's a win-win system."

Fair Vote Canada advocates for proportional representation systems of voting. Most of the time, when proportional representation is talked about in Canada, it is usually within the context of a provincial or federal election. But some say there are ways to get a fairer - and more representative - result at the municipal level too.

"One electoral tweak would be to have a run-off election," said Jim Far-

ney, a professor of political science who teaches a course called Electoral Systems and Voting at the University of Regina. "To get around the problem of whoever winning with a minority vote, you do the first run of the election, and then the top two candidates run against each other. And whoever gets more than 50 per cent wins."

As a Toronto resident, Smith said another problem with the existing system is that, too often, city councils are not adequately representative of the communities they're elected to represent.

"In Toronto, we have a problem where we have an enormously diverse city and that diversity is not reflected on our council," he said. "The number of women doesn't adequately reflect the population, let alone our various minority communities. There's something like 11 per cent minorities represented on council, whereas the population is close to 50 per cent. And that has something to do with the kind of voting system we have - you're going to end up with the least common denominators. So it's really hard for anyone who's a little bit different to get elected."

It's hard to say what kind of impact such a system might have had on Regina's recent election, but advocates of electoral reform say it's worth considering. Farney said other voting systems, such as the Single Transferable Vote (STV) might have had an impact on the election at the ward level. The STV system is a ranking system where candidates are ranked on the ballot, so if a voter's first choice doesn't make the cut, their second or third choice still has a shot at winning that seat.

"You could have the STV with ward councilors where you have a list and every voter ranks the first eight or 12 or however many (candidates). That would work fine with our existing system," he said.

Boost in advanced polls

by Creeson Agecoutay
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This year's civic election saw a rise in people who took advantage of the advance polls.

"I just couldn't wait. I was just dying to know whether Marian Donnelly will win," said Carle Steel, 46, an early voter in Ward 3.

"I would love to think that there will be new councillors and a new mayor with new progressive ideas - a council that is not unanimous all the time and less focused around developers and their interests," said Steel, who voted last Friday at a mall.

Susan Peterson, 50, a resident in Ward 6 also voted early and said she voted because of the increased notice of advance polling stations.

"I just wanted to get it over with and not have to go stand in line after work. I'm hoping they will get a bunch of new people in council and they will take another look at the stadium and not have tax payers pay the whole bill," said Peterson.

With advance voter turnout jumping from 1,295 in 2009 to 5,637 in 2012, City of Regina election coordinator Shelley Powell said her office explored new ways to increase the opportunities for people to vote and she is happy with the results.

"We had 52 regular polls in 2009. This year we decreased that number to 30 and we did that with the thought that we would increase the opportunities for advance polling," said Powell.

There was only one advance poll station in 2009, held at the Cathedral Neighborhood Centre. It ran for three days and resulted in 1,295 votes.

This year there were five advance poll stations held at SGI (167 votes), City Hall (825 votes), Victoria Square Mall (1,449 votes), Northgate Mall (1,540 votes) and Golden Mile (1,656 votes) which ran at different times from Oct. 10 to the 12 and Oct. 17 to 20.

Powell also said this year's numbers increased from the city's new idea of a drive-thru poll station at City Hall and offering free transit service on the advance polls and election day.

Lee Ward, a political science professor at the University of Regina said he had seen more excitement from this year's civic election and added that the stadium and former councillors stepping down created a wider turnout.

"When you have one issue that captures the imagination of the public, it tends to drive voter turnout I think more than it has in the past and voter intensity. The second reason is just the fact that we don't have as many as incumbents both in council and obviously in mayor so you have an open race and that generates excitement," said Ward.



Infographic by Matt Duguid. Information source City of Regina. Photo by Christopher Yip



Housing needed for aboriginal population

By Tonaya Marr
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Affordable housing is a vital issue in Regina, a city with a vacancy rate below 0.6 per cent, one of the lowest in the country. The need for places to live – though not impacted by race – has harshly affected Regina’s aboriginal population. Mayor-elect Michael Fougere has the power to improve the city’s housing situation if he forges connections with other levels of government, consults the public about the design of the homes and is supported by city councillors.

In Winnipeg between 2002 and 2008, the city partnered with the Manitoba and Canadian governments to improve housing in Winnipeg by upgrading, improving or building more than 8,000 affordable housing units, according to the article “Designing affordable housing with Cree, Anishinabe and Metis people” by Lawrence Deane and Eladia Smoke.

Many of the areas chosen for the affordable housing were central urban areas with a high concentration of aboriginal people. As a result, consultation was needed to make sure the design of the homes kept First Nations people in mind.

Regina has a similar situation: the city’s core areas have a high aboriginal population, many of whom will be impacted by the removal of Mosaic Stadium from its current location. As the current president of the Saskatchewan Construction Association, there’s no doubt that Fougere has ties to the construction industry in Regina. If generating affordable housing is the focus of the mayor-elect and members of the city council, consultation with those impacted must take place. The Winnipeg case demonstrates that failing to speak about design with those who will inhabit the houses

can create cultural and spiritual disagreements.

In many cases, it will be First Nations people living in these homes and their cultural needs should be accommodated. Encouraging aboriginal people to work with architects to come up with designs that are affordable and meet the needs of the population living in them makes sense.

Fougere has proposed a housing summit as a way of dealing with the vacancy rate. In *prairie dog* magazine, Fougere explained that to tackle the housing issue he would involve “all levels of government, key city officials, community groups,

housing industry leaders and the general public.”

If the federal and provincial governments could pitch in support in Winnipeg, it’s reasonable to ask for the same sort of funding in Regina. We’re a city that’s growing and we’re finding many of the same inner-city problems of larger centres like Winnipeg. Plus, teaming up with other governments will cut back on the tax dollars of Regina residents who are already about to be taxed to fund the \$278-million stadium, part of the \$1-billion Revitalize Regina Initiative that the city says will also see 700 affordable housing units built.

Fougere is not the only member of council who has made housing a priority. Ward 3’s newly elected councillor, Shawn Fraser, has identified housing as one of his key issues. In a recent Regina Leader-Post article, councillors for wards 1, 2, 4 and 10 have said they support the revitalization of Regina or the plan for the new stadium, both of which will directly impact the future of affordable housing in the city.

Newly-elected mayor Fougere and the city council need to get talks started with governments in order to secure funding for affordable housing, if they do consider housing a priority. Housing can’t come second to the stadium if the civic government is going to effectively meet the needs of Regina’s aboriginal population. If governments can be brought on board, then consultation with the First Nations people needs to begin, so homes can be built that meet the needs of Regina’s low-income residents. While revitalizing Regina is a priority for the newly elected leaders of the City, the improvements need to start with homes for their citizens.



Construction crews work on getting townhouses ready in Regina. Photo by Christopher Yip

New mayor and council must be patient

By Jordan Halkyard
@notjihalkyard

Regina has a new mayor and a new city council. However, Michael Fougere and his new city council will more than likely not be bringing a new attitude toward infrastructure funding with them. A focus on big infrastructure and major construction projects is likely to continue under the new mayor.

According to University of Regina economist Jason Childs, it is unlikely a new council will bring a change to the City’s policy direction.

“The former council was very interested in major infrastructure projects and major construction projects, in particular the stadium, and that is going to continue to be the focus of this new council. And let’s face it, building something as big and exciting as a stadium is fun, repaving a small crescent isn’t. It’s not the same photo op, it is not the same for public relations and that really matters

for politicians. If that makes sense economically is another question, but politically it makes a ton of sense,” Childs said.

Although the City may not be tackling small infrastructure projects in the near future, these projects are still important to Regina citizens. In Regina’s south end, potholes, cracked sidewalks and water main breaks have become common place. The deterioration of the area’s infrastructure has made it an important issue to voters when they go to the polls. However, Hillsdale resident Ray Fichter became disillusioned by promises of improvements to the south ends streets and sidewalks with little results.

“(All the candidates) said they were going to fix (the infrastructure here) but nothing ever happens,” Fichter said.

Though infrastructure concerns are an important issue to voters, according to Childs the City is unlikely to follow

through on these problems until infrastructure reaches a crisis point.

“Are people going to move out of (south end neighbourhood) Whitmore Park because the roads are bad? The roads have been bad in Whitmore Park for as long as I have known about it. (Neighbourhoods like this) are not going to become ghost towns because of the infrastructure, so it is very easy to ignore that problem until it reaches a crisis point. Like with the (natural gas explosion on Shannon Road) a couple of winters ago, suddenly that’s a crisis,” Childs stated.

Childs said in an ideal situation the City could utilize a model of funding known as “smoothing” to make sure it is prepared for any future infrastructure problems. The smoothing model is similar to the Keynesian economics theory of economics, where capital is saved during economic strength and spent during

times of economic weakness. Smoothing would see the City perform its major infrastructure renewal and construction projects when growth in the City has slowed and save and prepare for projects when growth is more rapid, as it currently is. However, the electorate seldom looks glowingly at their elected officials pinching pennies during times of economic strength.

“It is very, very difficult for politicians to save when they have money because people look at it as ‘you have money, why aren’t you spending it?’ And spending money is fun, not spending money and saying no is not fun. That is very difficult and tends to make (a politician) unpopular,” Childs explained.

“The realities of infrastructure funding in the 21st century require a significant change in the government’s role and its funding pattern. In particular, government funding should be transparent,

performance-based, sustained and long-term,” according to a 2009 study into Ontario’s infrastructure funding, authored by Tamer El-Diraby, Tammy Wolters and Hesham Osman .

Childs would like to see a more clear budgeting system. This would entail the City putting aside a clear amount of money for infrastructure to prepare for another boom

“(It) is tough to do and people want to spend. When cities sit on money, either they want to spend it or build something shiny,” said Childs.

Regina’s greatest asset in attracting new citizens to the community may end up being its greatest curse when it comes to its infrastructure. Regina’s strong economy has brought new workers, companies and capital to the community. However, if the new mayor and council are not patient with their new funds, the Queen City’s infrastructure may end up stuck in the past.

Election was not a stadium referendum

By Jonathan Hamelin
@JonathanH1991

The numbers don’t lie: Regi- nans still want a say regarding the new stadium. The citizens may have elected Michael Fougere as mayor, a candidate they knew was for the currently proposed stadium plan, but the combined percentages of the second- and third-place candidates – who both wanted to step back and get more public input before proceeding with the project – were greater than Fougere’s.

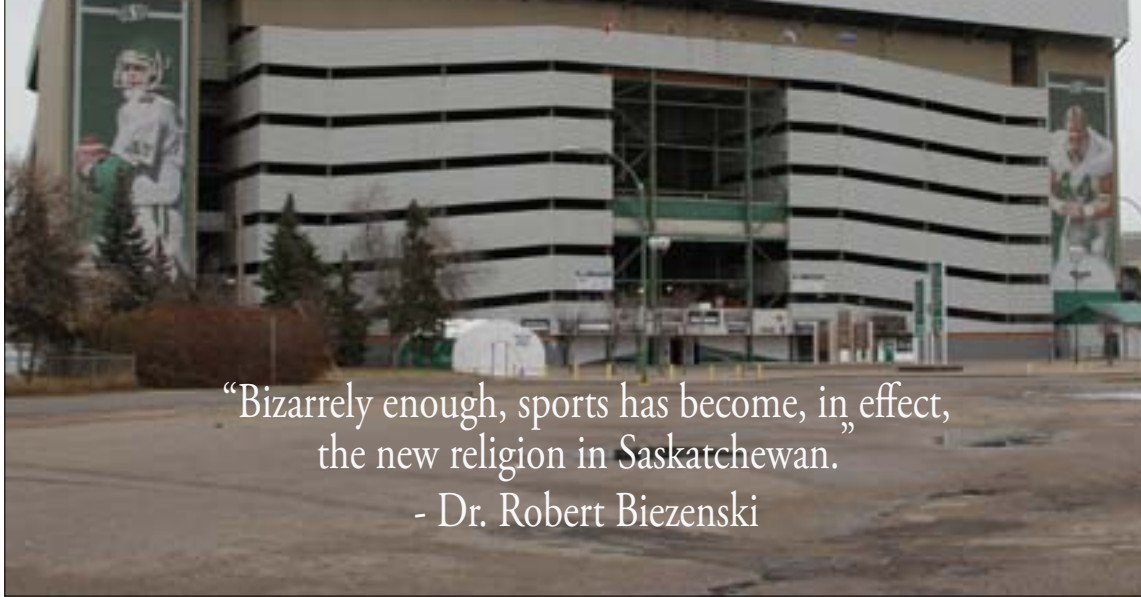
Therefore, if Fougere and his fellow city councillors will indeed be “going forward with the stadium,” as Fougere said shortly after being elected, they would be wise to incorporate more public involvement in the process, or else risk losing the respect of the people over the stadium, which has recently happened with a fellow prairie city, Winnipeg.

The question of public input regarding the new stadium was brought up from the beginning, shortly after Premier Brad Wall, alongside outgoing Mayor Pat Fiacco and Saskatchewan Roughriders board chair Roger Brandvold, announced a new \$278 million stadium would be built on the grounds of Evraz Place and be completed by 2017. Later on, the initial promise of private funding fell through and the City of Regina revealed that it would be contributing \$73 million to the project, meaning an increase in property taxes by 0.45 per cent a year for 10 years in Regina.

While a referendum on the be coming out of the people’s pockets caused a greater outcry for public consultation. Dawn Thomas, who ran and lost in Ward 9, went so far as to circulate a petition to force a referendum on the stadium. The petition has around 10,000 signatures but, with 20,000 needed by Nov. 7, it seems like an almost insurmountable goal.

While a referendum on the lecturer for the department of economics at the U of R, said the city could run a cost-benefit study on the stadium.

“In economics, there’s something that we call consumer surplus,” he said. “The way it works is that fans and people who take in a game occasionally, both season ticket holders and occasional ticket holders, plus people who don’t neces-



Despite renovations, a replacement for Mosaic Stadium is still the talk of the town. Photo by Christopher Yip

stadium likely won’t happen, the city’s leaders need to realize that there are ways they can, and should, better involve the public.

After all, as University of Regina sociology professor Robert Biezenski noted, the new stadium will be primarily used for the Roughriders, so it won’t be an issue that the public is going

are it and they have come to sort of define the cultural identity of Saskatchewan.

“It has become an emotional issue because it touches on the cultural identity of Saskatchewan.”

The question remains how much people are willing to pay for that identity.

Shaun Augustin, a sessional

sarily attend games but listen on the radio or watch on TV, get some sort of benefit over and above the ticket price. We call it a willingness to pay, or the value of the existence of the team locally.

“The government could get a sense of how much that is worth in terms of dollars to determine if it’s big enough to



Election badges sat mostly untaken at City Hall as results came in on Oct. 24. Photo by Matt Duguid

Enrolment rates change the future of Regina public schools

by Leslie-Ann Kroeker
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A 10-year plan, which would have closed another seven public schools in Regina, is a thing of the past. The current Regina Public School Board has bigger fish to fry for the next four-year term due to skyrocketing enrolment rates and a growing economy.

Like many social institutions in Saskatchewan, the economic boom has greatly affected the public school system because of the population increase. Closing schools at this point in time seems ineffective, seeing as several of them are at or exceeding capacity.

Three schools, Haultain, Dieppe and Athabasca, have closed in the past year and seven schools have closed altogether. But more children are now coming into the system than in past years, which is greatly shifting the future of Regina schools. This year an estimated 600 children were added to the system.

One of the issues the new board will deal with this term is the demand for schools in newer areas when other older schools still have capacity. Schools like Douglas Park and Arcola were recently built because of the new demographic shift in population.

But what about the future of those schools that have been at the heart of Regina for decades?

The University of Regina faculty of education department has been commissioned to provide a report for the Regina Public School Board on the status of capacity issues and building issues that hope to answer these questions.

“They’re going to have to make some tough decisions about the whole business of a physical plan. It’s not just as simple as closing down schools that are under populated, it’s system-wide,” said U of R dean of education James McNinch.

Along with low enrolment rates, some of the schools that closed recently had aging infrastructure problems. Some were built in the 50s and 60s and maintaining up-to-code building structure

was a capital investment. To the board, it was easier to build new or bus students to other schools.

Many Regina citizens have seen this as a contentious issue. Although it was feasible to close the community schools, it can have larger effects on the surrounding area. It means children can no longer walk to school and are bused to others. There is a loss of a community-gathering place.

Bill Gray, who spoke at a forum to keep Haultain school alive, has seen his neighbors bus their children to Glen Elm, causing a big adjustment in many lives. One family eventually moved. The entire atmosphere of the neighborhood has shifted.

“They didn’t want their children going to school on the bus. People don’t like to see change, especially with children,” said Gray.

Although it is too late for those schools, projection numbers tell a different story for the future of current Regina schools. The 10-year-plan originally anticipated 10,000 elementary students by 2018. Now the latest projections are looking closer to 14,000.

It is evident that there are many issues facing the new school board as it steps into a new term but proper allocation of funds is of core importance, according to the NDP education critic Trent Wotherspoon.

Today a new funding model is needed in order to adjust to the new demands, sustain programing, properly educate students, and help maintain aging infrastructure.

“At a time where we’re growing as a province, something we should be planning for as a province is looking beyond the current year or two and looking long-term. We need to make sure the school boards have the resources they need to make enriched education,” said Wotherspoon.

In the last provincial budget, the current government changed the funding model for community schools. Instead of giving direct funds to community



Dieppe school closed in June 2012. Photo by Christopher Yip

schools, it will now give bulk funds to the school division to allocate as it sees fit. This model will hurt the system. Although the demographics of a community school are changing, they are still essential in providing a sense of unity in a neighborhood.

“It’s a time where we have a growing population and quite simply the funding and support hasn’t followed. This puts school boards in a position where they need to make very difficult decisions,” said Wotherspoon.

Even Katherine Gagne, the current chairperson of the Regina Public School Board, said the provincial funding model can be frustrating when looking at the future of the schools and the projection numbers.

“There is only one pot. But it’s taxpayer money we’re relying on, as we have in the past but it’s something we’ve been advocating for, making sure we have appropriate funds for our school division,” said Gagne.

The future of the school system is on a day-to-day basis. The projections can be unpredictable as the population influxes. For example, Douglas Park and Arcola were commissioned to become new schools before the boom while several others were put on the chopping

block at that time.

“In many ways school divisions are always playing catch up,” said McNinch.

It is unlikely that schools will close in the future but that doesn’t mask the current issues the board faces today. Not closing schools is a step in the right directions, but the board must also focus on adequate funding in order to create a successful future for Regina public schools and the future of its children.

Regina Public Schools that have closed in the past 7 years:

- Athabasca 2011
- Dieppe 2012
- Haultain 2012
- Herchmer 2008
- Stewart Russell 2008
- Ken Jenkins 2010
- Usher 2008

Students fall short in mayoral demographics



Many students felt alienated by the election. Photo by Derek Cornet

by Derek Cornet
@Canadianmeat1

As mayoral hopefuls lobbied their key demographics during this year’s municipal election, it was evident as to which group appeared to be of least importance. Students, numbering around 13,000 at the University of Regina alone, seemed to be overlooked and their issues were left without answers. For whatever reason this occurred, it’s

fair to say representation of students on the municipal level will be low during the next four years.

Many ambitious projects this year were conducted through the University of Regina Student’s Union and the Regina Public Interest Research Group to encourage students to cast a ballot. URSU hosted a mayoral debate in the Ridell building and invited all the students to join. The attendance at the

mayoral debate proved to be very dismal: URSU president Nathan Sgrazzutti estimates only 35 per cent of the seats were filled. The lack of interest seemed to have sent a message to the mayoral candidates that students just don’t care about the municipal election.

RPIRG also decided to try encourage students to vote and perhaps sway the vote in their favour. They decided to publish a mayoral report card graded according to how candidates answered five questions. Topics included the environment, public transportation and affordable housing. Even though the research group found the report card to be successful, determined by a spike in website visits, it didn’t have any measurable impact on election day. Michael Fougere, who received the third lowest grade out of eight, was declared victorious by capturing 42 per cent of the vote.

Despite Fougere’s stated commitment to make affordable and below-market housing his first priority if he is elected mayor, the RPIRG ultimately gave him the lowest mark on the affordable housing question, giving him a mark of 3.53 out of 10. With high student voter apathy and dismal student interest, it’s highly unlikely that the affordable

housing issues face by students will be addressed anytime soon.

None of the mayoral candidates had any specific plans on how to alleviate the housing problem for students. While all, especially the top three vote getters, realized there was a housing crisis, nothing concrete besides consultations and summits were offered to find a solution.

Conrad Hewitt, a council hopeful for Ward 1, meanwhile, had a specific plan on how to address the problem for students. He suggested offering property tax incentives for homeowners in close proximity to the university. The tax incentive would have given property owners grants after they had renovated and built secondary suites in their homes. Perhaps if this type of incentive were made known to students and included in mayoral platforms, students would have had more of a desire to vote.

While some students did vote during the election, its probably safe to assume the vast majority did not. Whether it be the lack of engagement by candidates or ineligibility and voter apathy by students, there will be a feeling of exclusion as those students who didn’t vote haven’t been represented.

City pension deficit poses problem for new council

by Roxanna Woloshyn
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Barely a week has gone by to remind us of the last vestiges of the 2012 campaign hopefuls. Regina has a new mayor and council, and, a wicked problem to deal with – one that the City of Regina has been struggling with for over a decade.

The City of Regina’s unresolved and growing pension deficit reduction is a lurking menace that, if not solved soon, will create significant challenges for Regina’s future growth and prosperity.

Mayoral candidate and city employee Tim Sickawitch, whose biggest campaign issue in 2012 was the pension deficit fund, did not win the election. But it is clear he reached his objective - to create public interest in this long unresolved dispute between the City of Regina and its employees. Late in the race, it created an interesting diversion to the other money issues that dominated the election, namely, the stadium and housing.

During the campaign, Michael Fougere avoided the issue, saying it was being dealt with. Marion Donnelly took time to understand the growing problem. And Meka Okochi said it was in his platform from the beginning to address it. But none of the top three candidates were able to offer a concrete solution.

Regina’s pension deficit issue is complex, multifaceted, highly controversial and divisive, and pits City of Regina management against its employees.

According to Colin Lowenberger, the city’s director of pension and disability administration, the pension deficit has grown to \$293 million and the current structure of the fund

is not sustainable. There are several reasons for this.

Based on the City of Regina’s 2009 Plan Valuation report, there are several inherent issues affecting the plan’s sustainability.

First, there are fewer members actively paying into the plan because workers are retiring earlier and living longer, meaning they draw more benefits from the plan than was anticipated when it was drafted.

Second, the financial status of the plan has been problematic. In the last 20 years, the plan experienced only one surplus, and that was in 1999.

Third, the unanticipated recession in 2008 was a significant setback, not just for the city workers pension plan but for all pension plans. Recovery of pension investments has been slow and steady but not adequate to address the shortfall.

Fourth, in comparison to The City of Saskatoon’s pension fund benefits, Regina’s pension fund is richer in benefits. For example, it offers a bridging benefit to age 65 and a guaranteed cost of living adjustment clause, whereas the City of Saskatoon does not.

According to Regina’s 2009 Plan Valuation, Saskatoon’s city pension deficit was projected at \$23 million, whereas Regina’s was more than 10 times larger at \$238 million.

Mayor-elect Fougere and the new council will need to have a deeper understanding of the issues and options for pension plan sustainability. The recommendations outlined in the 2009 plan valuation approved by the city’s pension plan board were filed with Saskatchewan’s superintendent of pensions in October 2010.

According to Brent Sjoberg,



These outside city workers are paying into a pension sitting at a \$293 million deficit. Photo by Roxanna Woloshyn

deputy city manager and chief financial officer, the plan identifies two primary options to work towards financial stability. First, it suggests a contribution rate increase on the part of the five employer groups and the 21 employee groups. And second, it calls for a reduction to future benefits. These two actions would put more money into the plan.

This is something that has not gone over well with employees and has added to the length of the negotiations.

Overall, the financial assets of the plan appear to be managed accountably by a pension board, which includes professional money managers that invest funds and professional administrative managers that oversee this process on behalf of the members. For example, even though the plan has shown that it is earning money at an average rate of nine percent annually over the last

20 years, this is still not enough money to sustain the fund.

So, under the current situation, there is enough money for workers to retire on the plan. But the real issue is what is left in the plan for people who are paying into it now and who will retire in the future.

Despite the earning success of the plan, its inherent structure appears to be flawed because it is based on a model that was developed over 50 years ago.

The employer groups, which include the city, have proposed to cover the nearly \$300 million dollar deficit on the condition that the current plan be replaced by a new ‘target benefit’ pension plan, which would create new conditions for new hire employees. Essentially, employee benefits would be reduced.

One complication is that the current plan governance structure requires all parties to

reach a consensus in changes to the plan. And, there are no guidelines for how the negotiation process works. Adding to the problem is the number of representatives negotiating the deal. Each of the 21 employee groups has three representatives, and each of the five employer groups also has three representatives. That means there are nearly 100 people needed to reach a consensus.

The issue for a new mayor and city council is not just understanding the larger complex problem but what implications the new agreement, when reached, will have on city council’s budget.

The reality is, city council may ultimately have to increase the mill rate in order to meet the financial requirements agreed to by all parties.

The new settlement is expected to be presented to city council by the end of this year.

Gauging the political involvement of new Canadians

by Chris Yip
@christophersyip

There were optimistic expectations for a high voter turnout in last Wednesday’s mayoral election. Although there were fewer polling stations citywide compared to the 2009 election, the line-up leading to the station I visited stretched far.

The number of candidates gave Reginas a wide spectrum to choose from, and because of their diversity some speculated a large increase in voter participation from the 25 per cent seen in the 2009 municipal election. Despite this, however, only 33 per cent of voters went to the polls last week.

Why was there such a small voter turnout this year? Who are Reginans who choose not to vote? One might assume the answer lies with new Canadian citizens – immigrants moving here from outside of Regina. But how well-supported is that assumption in reality?

There’s no doubt we have plenty of brand-new voters in

the Queen City. “Saskatchewan is still growing fast, with immigrants making up virtually all of the people who moved to the province in the first three months of the year,” according to a recent Statistics Canada report.

“Immigrant status does not appear to make a huge difference in the probability of voting.”
-Bevelander and Pendakur

Saskatchewan grew by 5000 people in the first quarter of 2012, adding to a boost of nearly 20,000 people between 2011 and 2012. This exponential growth is the most the province has seen since 1930.

Some might believe that immigrants are growing the population but staying away from political involvement. While it is plain to see the increase in immigrants moving to Saskatchewan and locally in Regina, this does not mean that the immigrant population was apathetic in the election.

In their paper “Social capital and voting participation of immigrants and minorities in Canada,” Pieter Bevelander and Ravi Pendakur examined voting behaviour in provincial and federal elections. The two professors studied the results

of the 2002 edition of the Equality Security Community survey – which records personal characteristics like age, education, political awareness, and ethnicity – and compared the likelihood of individuals to vote based on comparisons. Their findings revealed that, on the list of factors effecting how a person votes, newness to the country was one of the least consequential.

“The impact of immigration and ethnicity is largely overridden,” the authors wrote. Research showed that, although

there were differences in voting probability between immigrant cultures, on average minorities had the same odds of voting as British origin respondents.

“Immigrant status does not appear to make a huge difference in the probability of voting. About 80 per cent of the Canadian-born population and immigrants who arrived after the age of 15 said they voted in the last federal election,” they wrote.

The top factors that affected a person’s probability of voting were their age, their level of education, and their civic engagement prior to election time. Engagement in particular was key to voter participation. A curious pattern in the study showed that visible minorities who watched and read the news in their language of origin were more engaged than the minorities who experienced the news in the majority language. Interestingly, Bevelander and Pendakur found that a “sense of belonging” in Canada had

a negative impact on provincial voting. Does this hint at a complacency born of comfort? The voter apathy that arose from this past civic election, then, may be rooted not in disregard for politics by newcomers but indifference by citizens who have lived here long enough to stop caring.

For immigrants moving to Regina, it may take months or even years before they can say with confidence it is their new home. Some new Canadians like Joan Ting jumped at the chance to be part of their civic community, as soon as they have fulfilled the requirement of living in Saskatchewan for six months.

“We see the difference. You can see during the election time, people listen,” Ting said, who participated in her first municipal election.

“If you want to say something, or to let the authority know what you’re thinking, I think the election is important.”

Slow action on waste management likely to continue

by Matt Duguid
@Mattdogood

Michael Fougere’s mayoral candidacy was seen by many as a continuation of the policies implemented under Pat Fiacco. Fougere campaigned on continuing down the path that Fiacco had broken ground on, namely the Regina Revitalization Initiative.

The pair, Fiacco and Fougere, have worked together throughout Fiacco’s 12-year stint as mayor, Fougere having served as city councilor for the last 15 years.

“I thought Pat was going to do a really good job, and I just supported him and what he was doing and we have tended to see things pretty much the same for the last 12 years,” Fougere told the Regina *Leader-Post*.

It is likely that Fougere will continue to focus on many of the issues that former mayor

Fiacco did. What remains to be seen is whether Fougere continues to let those issues that were out of focus under Fiacco remain on the margins.

On the issue of recycling, composting and waste management, it looks like Reginans will see a similar speed of action as they did under Fiacco; that is to say, fairly slow. In Green Provinces report card, issued by Corporate Knights annually, Saskatchewan ranked eight out of nine provinces rated. Although the study considered waste management province-wide, it had some surprising results. Saskatchewan residents diverted 145 kilograms of waste per person, while New Brunswick residents diverted more than twice that amount, 357 kilograms per person.

Credit should be given to Fiacco and Fougere though, as both were part of council when

the city voted to implement its first mandatory curbside recycling program, gaining final approval on Sept.17, 2012 and going into effect on July 1, 2013.

The program has been a long time coming, though. Even former mayor Pat Fiacco has recognized the city’s slow speed of action.

“Here we are in the 20th century, where a majority of Canadian cities have a curbside recycling program that’s mandated and...in Saskatchewan the two major cities do not,” he told the *Leader-Post* after council had passed the new bylaw. To put it in perspective, when the first recycling collection trucks hit the streets in Regina, the City of Edmonton’s curbside program will be celebrating its 25th birthday.

Fougere’s plan for recycling and waste management received criticism during the

“Here we are in the 20th Century, where a majority of Canadian cities have a curbside recycling program that’s mandated and...in Saskatchewan the two major cities do not.”
-Pat Fiacco

campaign as well. In a candidate’s report card authored by the Regina Public Interest Research Group, Fougere’s waste management and recycling policies garnered him an F.

When asked to answer questions regarding decreasing waste, improving recycling and instating a composting plan Fougere responded by writing: “We have set aside \$55 million for a waste treatment plan. I support the recently approved recycling program approved by the City of Regina. This service will start July 1, 2013.”

With this statement Fougere avoided addressing waste management and recycling in any great detail.

“I don’t think he gave us a concrete vision for the future in terms of detailed long term planning,” said Halena Seifertling, outreach and events coordinator for RPIRG.

If the new mayor does decide to follow the current Regina Waste Plan, residents could see new environmentally-friendly practices in the city. Work is currently underway to examine enhanced waste services that could include the collection of leaf and yard waste, household hazardous waste and bulky waste collection, but council won’t be addressing any of these concerns until 2013.

In the meantime, Regina will continue to lag behind other major Canadian centres in terms of waste management.



Fougere’s take on waste management recieved an F by the RPIRG. Photo by Christopher Yip

The arts – not Fougere’s forte

by Jazminn Hintz
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The stadium was the story of the 2012 Regina City election. Other important issues where pushed aside in an election that named its single-button issue before the election even began. From that point on, battle lines were drawn between those who supported the stadium and those who didn’t.

With a one-topic election other important issues weren’t given fair speaking time. In the end, it was the candidate who fully supported the stadium, Michael Fougere, who came away with the win. Marian Donnelly, the candidate known for her arts background, came in second.

With a stadium voice winning the election, the arts representation is gone and the city will have to find a new voice, other than the mayor, to speak for those interested in the arts.

Donnelly was unable to make a win for the arts community, a boost she and arts advocates thought was needed. Fougere didn’t have the same priority because arts wasn’t in his platform as it was Donnelly’s. Fougere named sustainable growth, tax dollar value, safe community and strong leadership in his platform.

Yet the City of Regina website lists arts as important, stating arts and culture are “tremendous

assets that are vital when building a creative city.” Arts isn’t Fougere’s priority but that doesn’t mean he can ignore them.

As the director of the Art Gallery of Regina, the arts are dear to Karen Schoonover, but she predicts hope for the arts in Regina won’t come from Fougere.

“(Arts funding) will be lessened but certainly I think the new members of city council have a much broader focus than the outgoing (councillors),” she said.

Despite Schoonover and Donnelly’s concern about a potential decrease in arts funding, there has actually been an increase to city arts funding in recent years, coming from a council Fougere was also a part of.

The City offers community grants for artistic and cultural festivals and the pot has grown. In 2010 the City gave a total of \$120,300 to 17 different festival programs. By 2012 that amount has risen to \$161,300 and 18 festivals. It isn’t as much growth as arts advocates would like to see, but it’s moving in the right direction - and with the City flourishing economically, this growth is likely to continue.

It seems citizens agree. In the 2011 survey, residents said they thought the city was paying attention to their arts needs. Survey respondents gave the city 3.49 out of 5 in the performance of

Regina supporting arts and culture, and being satisfied with city arts facilities and services. Of all the economic city issues covered in the survey, arts was the only category where the performance, 3.49, out-ranked the importance, at 3.46. One can’t say the arts have been ignored when more people see positive outcomes than those who value the arts as important.

If the Regina arts scene is in need of help that’s where the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance can step in. The organization promotes arts policies and support measures that encourage a healthy environment for the arts. It works with politicians, government and the public to establish the importance of arts in society.

Schoonover said in her mind it’s up to council to make the changes she thinks are needed.

“I think it will be business as usual. However, I think there are several new members on city council (who)...seem to have more of a focus on arts and culture.”

Fougere isn’t the arts representative Donnelly would have been but he is only one man and his isn’t the only voice that matters. Regina’s arts future may rest with newly elected councillors Young, Hawkins, Fraser, Burnett, Findura, Murray, Bryce, O’Donnell, Hincks and Flegel.

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